MONSTRESS

ISSUE 2

MARJORIE LIU

SANA TAKEDA

image

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MONSTRESS

MARJORIE LIU • SANA TAKEDA

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THE STORY SO FAR... In the aftermath of a devastating war, tensions between humans and hybrid Arcanics are higher than ever. In the Federation, captured Arcanics are sold to the highest bidder in a vibrant slave trade. The Cumaea, powerful but fully-human witch-nuns, experiment on those slaves behind the walls of their stronghold in the city of Zamora, extracting precious, life-giving lilium from Arcanic bodies.

Maika Halfwolf, an Arcanic survivor of the war, is looking for both revenge and answers. She has recently developed terrible powers and an equally terrible hunger – all of which she believes is connected to a conspiracy involving her mother and her mother's murder. Maika leaves behind her friend Tuya and allows herself to be sold into slavery to infiltrate the Cumaean stronghold. Once inside, she frees the other prisoners and storms the compound, destroying everything and everyone in her wake – including the mysterious Yvette, who possesses both memories of Maika's mother and a fragment of a mask imbued with unknown power.

Mask fragment in tow, Maika escapes Zamora with two Arcanic children. But just when they've reached the sanctity of the forest, that terrible hunger overtakes her once more...

MONSTRESS CREATED BY MARJORIE LIU & SANA TAKEDA

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Investigation Report
RE: The Zamora Massacre
The city of Zamora is located within the truce-lands between the Human Federation and the Arcanic Realms.
Moreover, the Cumaean chapter house of Zamora is one of the oldest in the Federation. It is said to be located in the exact spot where Marium received her first wound.
OH, GODDESS. THEY'RE REALLY HERE.
HOW CAN THIS BE HAPPENING? WE DIDN'T DO ANYTHING WRONG!
THEY... THEY TOOK US BY SURPRISE. LUCKY... WE MADE IT BACK INSIDE THE CHAPTER HOUSE...
PUT DOWN YOUR WEAPONS, YOU IDIOTS! YOU'LL ONLY MAKE IT WORSE!
PLEASE... DON'T LET THEM TAKE ME ALIVE...
Here are the facts as we know them:
I WON'T! I WON'T LET THEM TAKE YOU!
STOP... ALL OF YOU STOP...
ZZAM!
AUGH!
BOOM!
The inner gate of the compound, a Trissentine relic blessed by Mother Superior Benecia IV, was destroyed through the clear use of Arcanic magics, the likes of which have not been witnessed since the last Holy War.

The Mother Superior's personal coven of Inquisitrixes attended the investigation and corroborates this finding of the forensic team (please find attached their report).
WHAT A PATHETIC MESS.
The violence committed against the brave members of our order can only be described as obscene.
FULL SWEEP. POST GUARDS OUTSIDE LADY YVETTE'S CHAMBERS.
PLEASE - URK!
OH, YES. MAKE SURE SOME OF THE WOUNDS LOOK... EATEN. HACK OFF A FEW LIMBS HERE AND THERE.
Arcanics have never shown mercy to our kind. They are abominations who thrive off the anguish and suffering of their victims. Mercy is a concept wholly foreign to their foul intelligences.
Their souls are contaminated with evil.

Fortunately, there were two survivors who can bear witness to the crime.
I DON'T KNOW WHY I BOTHERED WASTING GOOD LILIUM ON YOU, SOPHIA. THE INQUISITRIXES HAVE COME.
CAN YOU HEAR THE SCREAMS? YOU SHOULD HAVE RETURNED WITH ME TO THE FEDERATION WHEN YOU HAD THE CHANCE.
...ATENA...
YES?
...YOU... TALK... TOO... MUCH...
SHUT UP, YOU CRAZY BITCH.
OH, NO. YOU.
WELL, NOW. LADY ATENA.
SUCH A PLEASURE TO SEE YOU AGAIN. ON YOUR FEET THIS TIME, TOO.
GUARDS! PUT DOWN YOUR WEAPONS! DON'T FIGHT HER, DAMN IT!
I'M NOT DYING.
YOU'RE ALREADY DEAD.

SWSSHH
SWSSHH
SWSSHH
LADY ATENA...
YOU LOOK *NEARLY* LIKE YOURSELF. THOSE NEW LILIUM BALMS REALLY *DO* WORK MIRACLES ON SCARS, DON'T THEY?
BUT JUST LOOK AT WHAT THEY DO TO ONE'S *HAIR.*
MY LADY INQUISITRIX. IT IS... AN HONOR... TO BE IN YOUR PRESENCE. I BEG THE MOST FAVORED MERCY OF YOUR BENEVOLENCE.
YOU'LL BE BEGGING FOR MORE THAN THAT, I'M AFRAID.
BUSINESS *FIRST,* HOWEVER.
THE MOTHER SUPERIOR HERSELF HAS COME FOR *LADY YVETTE.* WHERE IS SHE?
DEAD.
AND THE MASK?
WHAT MASK?
AH.

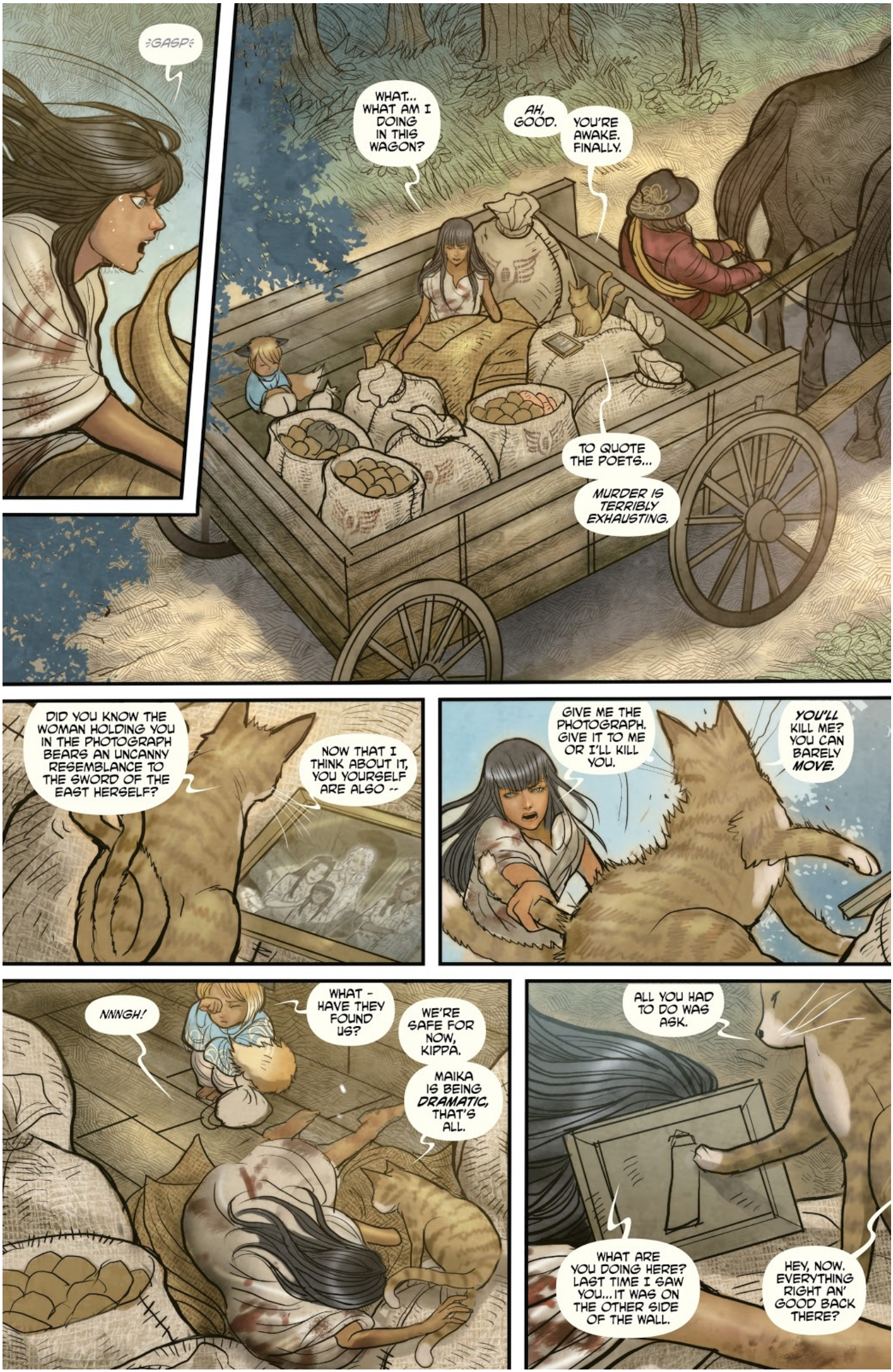
WHAT A FOOL I WAS.
NOW I KNOW WHY YOU STAYED AWAY FROM ME ALL THESE YEARS.
WHY YOU REMAINED AMONG THE SAVAGES.
SO.
LADY SOPHIA PURCHASES A SLAVE GIRL. A GIRL WITH THE MARK OF THE ECLIPSING EYE UPON HER CHEST.
A GIRL WHO PROMPTLY BREAKS FREE OF OUR UNBREAKABLE COLLARS, STEALS SACRED PROPERTY -- WHICH SHOULD NOT HAVE BEEN HERE IN THE FIRST PLACE -- AND ALSO MANAGES TO MURDER A SENIOR MEMBER OF OUR ORDER.
SUCH AN *INTRIGUING* SHOW OF STRENGTH.
A TRACKING PARTY WAS SENT AFTER OUR THIEF. AND I SENT YOUR SISTER AFTER *THEM.* LET US HOPE THAT WILL BE ENOUGH TO BRING DOWN THIS WILD CHILD.

LADY ATENA. MY DAUGHTERS DISCOVERED A SIGNIFICANT AMOUNT OF LILIUM WITHIN THESE CHAMBERS, AND IN LADY SOPHIA'S LAB.
PURE LILIUM, FROM AN ANCIENT, NO LESS. IN FULL CONTRAVENTION OF THE TREATY OF ORLEEN.
MOST HOLY MOTHER, I CAN ONLY ASSUME THAT THE LILIUM USED IN LADY SOPHIA'S RESEARCH WAS APPROVED BY THE HIGHEST ECHELONS OF THE COUNCIL.
I SERIOUSLY DOUBT THAT.
STILL, ITS PRESENCE IS FORTUITOUS. YVETTE SIMPLY CANNOT STAY DEAD.
MOTHER SUPERIOR, FOR TEMPORARY REANIMATION TO WORK, THE BODY MUST BE PREPARED, AND THE LILIUM MODULATED.
THE PROCESS WILL TAKE A WEEK AT LEAST AND THE EFFECTS RARELY LAST LONGER THAN A MINUTE. LADY SOPHIA IS THE ONLY ONE WHO --
LADY SOPHIA IS UNFORTUNATELY OCCUPIED WITH BEING A ROAST.
HAVE FAITH, ATENA. THE GODDESS ALWAYS FINDS A WAY, ESPECIALLY FOR HER MOST *REVERED* SERVANTS.
SHLCK

AHHHHHH!
GUARD, PLEASE RESTRAIN OUR NEWLY RESURRECTED YVETTE.
WHAT... THE... FUCK.
ARRGH!
SPLURCH!
HOW ASTONISHING.
MY DAUGHTERS, GO FIND YOUR SISTER. THE ALL-MOTHER KNOWS SHE MAY NEED HELP WITH OUR REMARKABLE ARCANIC THIEF.
I'LL HANDLE YVETTE'S INTERROGATION MYSELF.
SHE HAS MUCH TO ANSWER FOR.

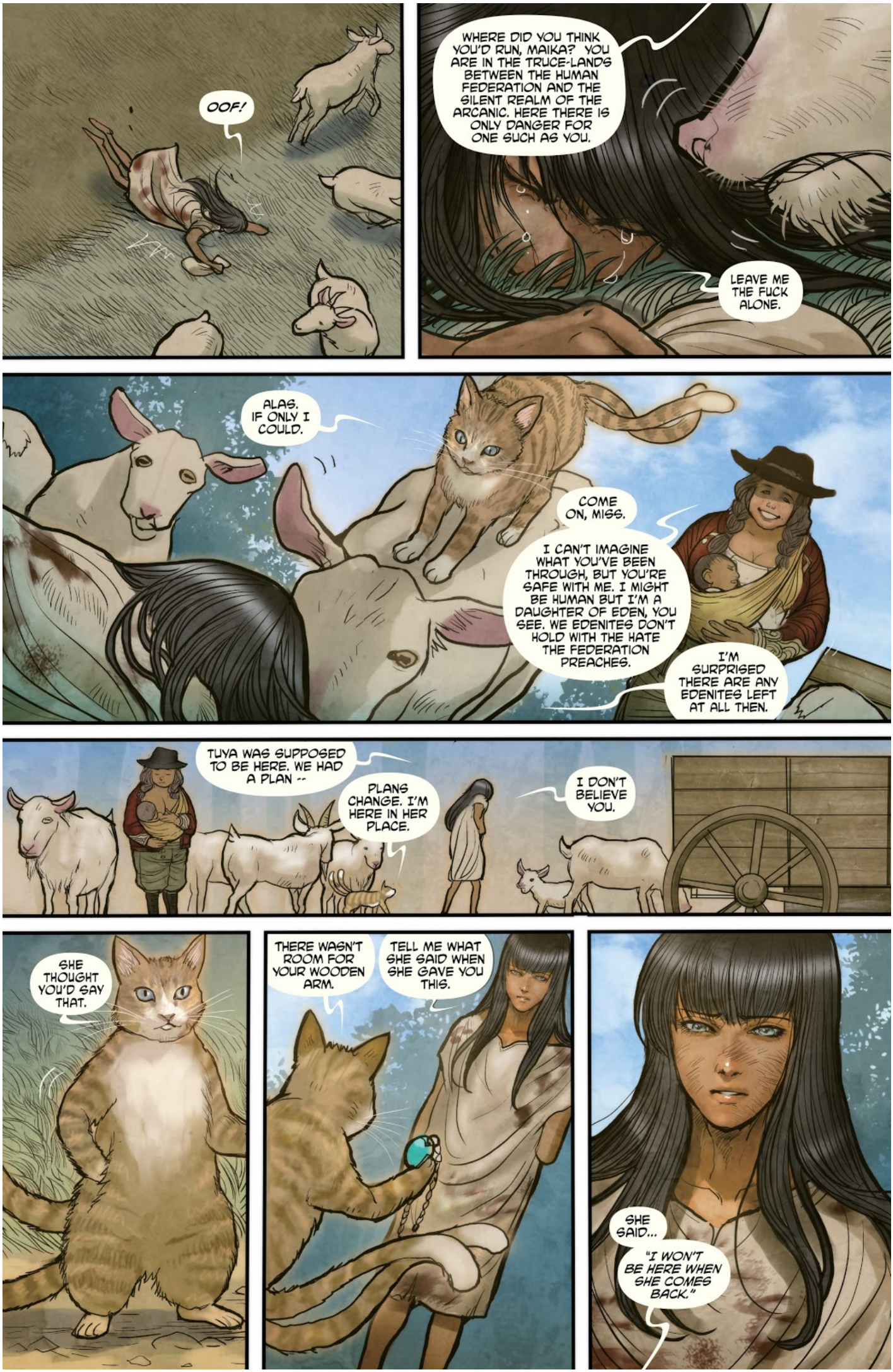
TWO WEEKS AGO.
Tomorrow I leave for Zamora, but tonight we drink.
I'm glad this isn't a place for talking. Or farewells.
MAIKA, THERE'S SOMETHING I NEED TO TELL YOU.
Tuya is saying something, but I cannot hear her.
TAKE HER DOWN!
YOU'VE ALMOST GOT HER!
I don't want to hear her.
NNNGAH!
WHO WILL CHALLENGE ME?!
NOT TONIGHT.
EVERY NIGHT.

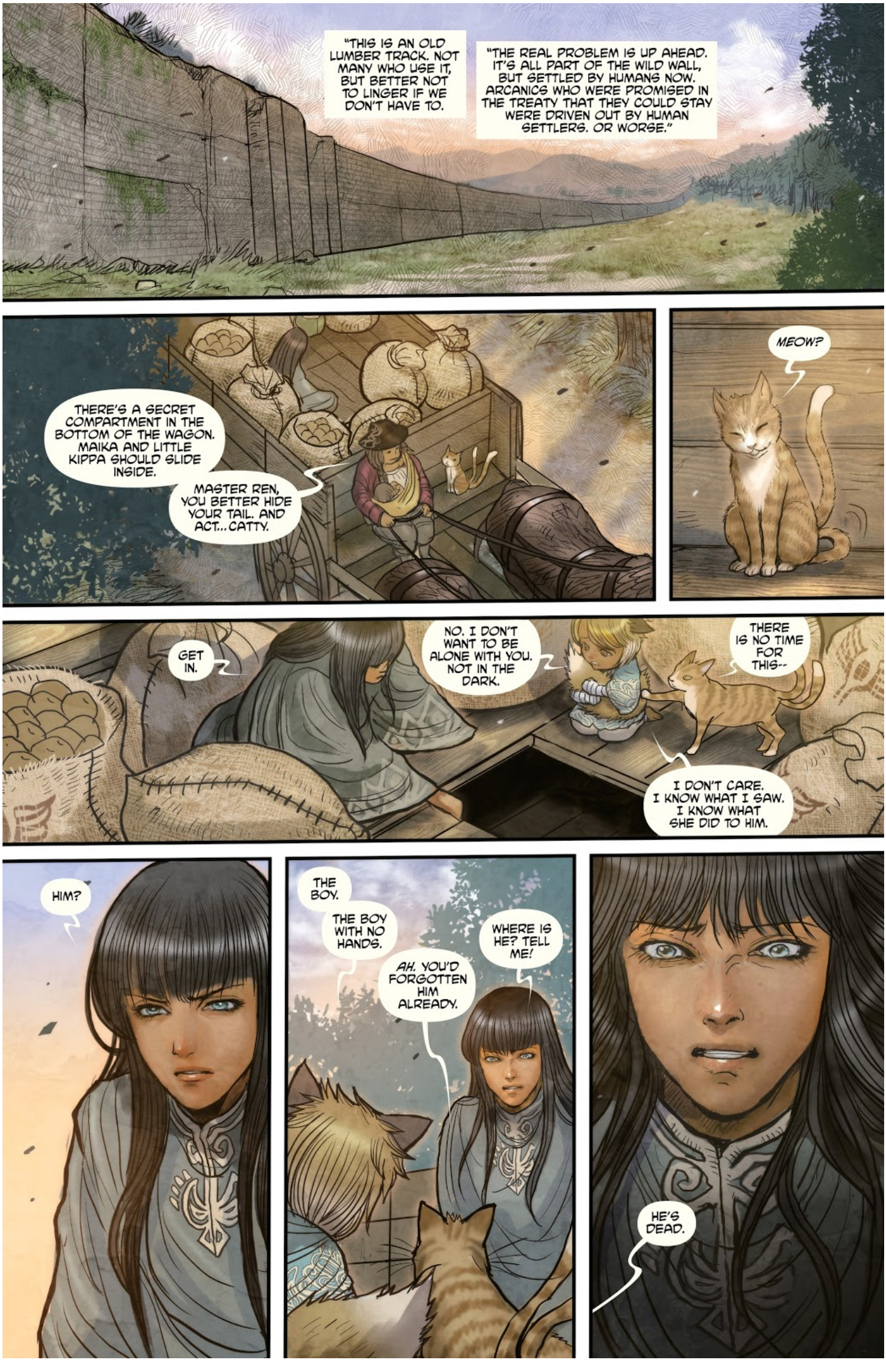
These are the Scyth people. They follow the fleet herds from the Caracol Mountains to the Cape of Bone.
HALFWOLF! HALFWOLF!
Strong, independent. They bring me information. They respect me. Some of them fear me.
They marvel at my strength.
Sometimes I do, too.
I know almost nothing about myself. I don't know who I am.
All I know is that I've seen death herself. That I survived.
I know that I once had a mother.
WHY ARE YOU SO ANGRY?
DOESN'T MATTER ANYMORE.
Tuya thinks I'm insane to keep searching for answers.
Sometimes my head goes dark for months. All she says is that I've gone back to the war.
She doesn't know about the dreams. Where I murder her, burn the wagon, kill myself. She doesn't know about the hunger.
During the war I thought surviving would be enough.
But surviving is the easy part.
I want her to say something.
But I guess she's said everything she needs to.
I leave at dawn while she sleeps. The moon will stay full for another three weeks. I pray it helps. I don't feel sad or frightened.
I feel angry.
And something else I can't name.


:GASP:
WHAT... WHAT AM I DOING IN THIS WAGON?
AH, GOOD.
YOU'RE AWAKE. FINALLY.
TO QUOTE THE POETS...
MURDER IS TERRIBLY EXHAUSTING.
DID YOU KNOW THE WOMAN HOLDING YOU IN THE PHOTOGRAPH BEARS AN UNCANNY RESEMBLANCE TO THE SWORD OF THE EAST HERSELF?
NOW THAT I THINK ABOUT IT, YOU YOURSELF ARE ALSO --
GIVE ME THE PHOTOGRAPH. GIVE IT TO ME OR I'LL KILL YOU.
YOU'LL KILL ME? YOU CAN BARELY MOVE.
NNNGH!
WHAT - HAVE THEY FOUND US?
WE'RE SAFE FOR NOW, KIPPA.
MAIKA IS BEING DRAMATIC, THAT'S ALL.
ALL YOU HAD TO DO WAS ASK.
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE? LAST TIME I SAW YOU... IT WAS ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WALL.
HEY, NOW. EVERYTHING RIGHT AN' GOOD BACK THERE?

NO FIGHTIN' IN MY WAGON, PLEASE. THOSE ARE NICE EATS I NEED TO SELL. CAN'T HAVE YOU DAMAGING THEM.
OUR DEEPEST APOLOGIES, MISTRESS EMILIA. YOUR KINDNESS HAS ALREADY BEEN WITHOUT MEASURE...
...AND IS MATCHED ONLY BY YOUR GRACE.
OH, YOU CATS.
THE MASK...
...DON'T TOUCH ME... DON'T TOUCH ME...
WHO SAID THIS WAS YOURS?
DON'T TOUCH ME!
MISTER REN MADE ME CARRY IT FOR YOU.
BUT I DIDN'T WANT TO. IT HURT MY HAND.
IT'S CURSED.
YOU CAN FEEL IT.
LEAVE HER BE.
< THE CHILD DOESN'T SPEAK HANNIC. BUT YOU DO. >
< WHAT DO I CARE WHAT SHE HEARS OR UNDERSTANDS? >
< BECAUSE SHE'S FRIGHTENED ENOUGH. AND MY FRIEND EMILIA IS ONLY HUMAN. >
< SO. YOU RISKED YOUR LIFE, YOU SLAYED, YOU BURNED -- YOU MAY HAVE STARTED A WAR -- ALL FOR THAT OBSCENE OBJECT. >
< I PROMISE YOU, IT WASN'T WORTH IT. >
< I DIDN'T GO TO THAT PLACE FOR THIS. >
< BUT IT'S SOMETHING IMPORTANT. SOMETHING THE WITCH-NUN VALUED. SOMETHING THAT CHANGED HER. >

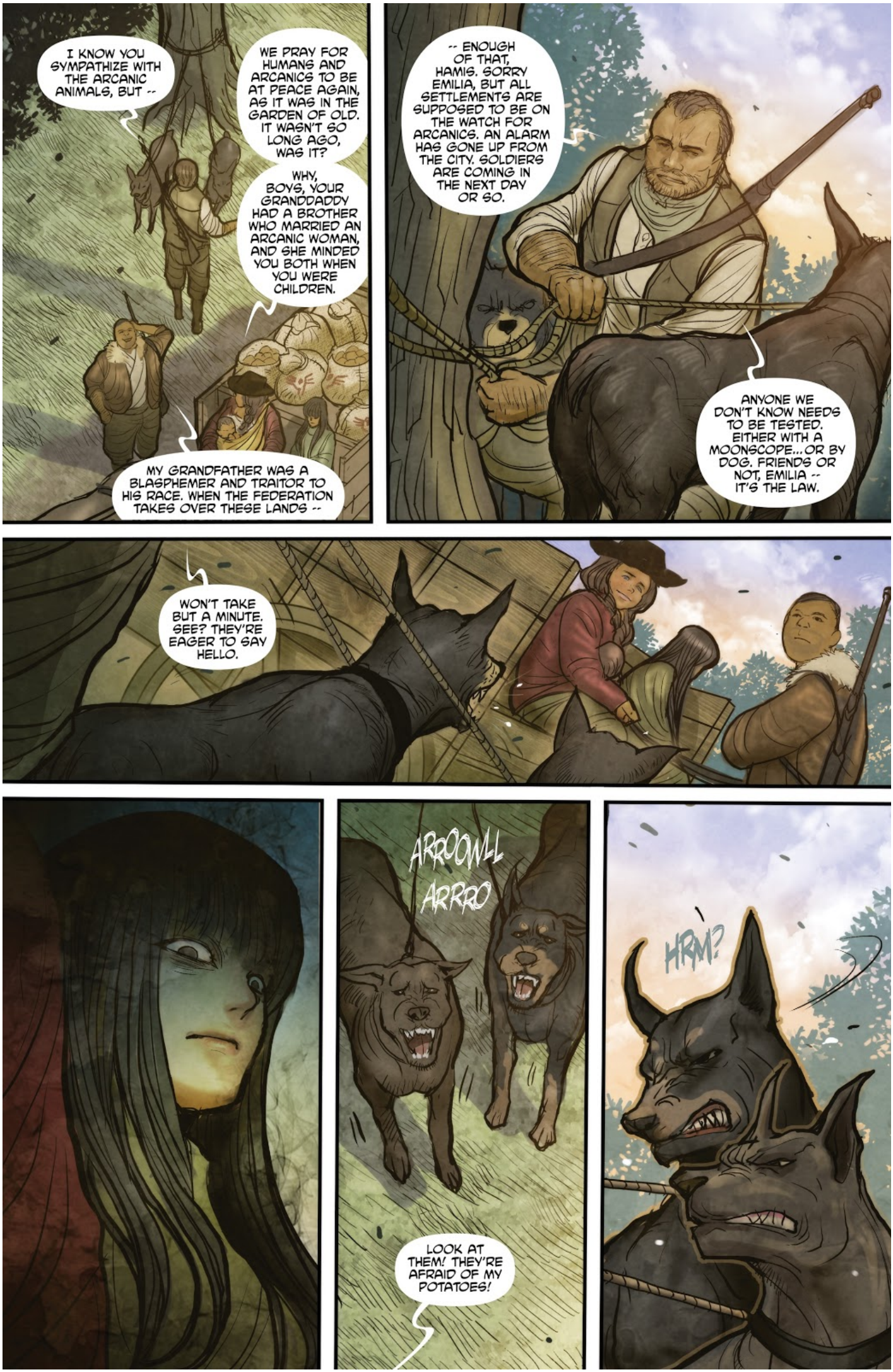
< OF COURSE IT CHANGED HER, IF SHE HAD IT LONG ENOUGH. >
< THAT IS AN ARTIFACT FROM THE LOST AGE, WROUGHT OF BLASPHEMOUS MATERIALS POISONOUS TO ALL LIVING CREATURES. >
< EVEN THE CHILD FELT THE DANGER OF IT. THAT TRINKET WILL GET YOU EXECUTED ON BOTH SIDES OF THE WALL. BY HUMAN AND ARCANIC AUTHORITIES ALIKE. >
...ALL WILL BE DEVOURED...
< NO ARCANIC CAN TOUCH IT WITHOUT BURNING. >
< THOUGH IT SEEMS YOU ENJOY PAIN... I WOULD ADVISE YOU NOT TO HANDLE IT LONG. >
< IF IT TAINTS YOU, IT WILL WARP YOUR FORM... EVEN YOUR SOUL, THE POETS SAY. AND NOT EVEN THE MOST CORRUPT ARCANIC WILL COME NEAR YOU. >
< YOU WILL BE AN OUTSIDER FOREVER. SO IT IS WRITTEN. >
< WHAT MAKES YOU AN EXPERT? >
< I MAKE IT MY BUSINESS TO KNOW MANY THINGS. >
< YOU SHOULD BANDAGE YOUR HAND. THE CHILD WAS INJURED. >
< I'M FINE. I DIDN'T FEEL ANY PAIN. >
< MAYBE YOU'RE A LIAR, CAT. >
< MAYBE YOU'RE HERE FOR WHAT'S IN THIS BAG. EVERYONE KNOWS YOUR KIND ARE THIEVES. >
AH, YES, THE CASUAL BIGOTRY OF FOOLS.


OOF!
WHERE DID YOU THINK YOU'D RUN, MAIKA? YOU ARE IN THE TRUCE-LANDS BETWEEN THE HUMAN FEDERATION AND THE SILENT REALM OF THE ARCANIC. HERE THERE IS ONLY DANGER FOR ONE SUCH AS YOU.
LEAVE ME THE FUCK ALONE.
ALAS. IF ONLY I COULD.
COME ON, MISS.
I CAN'T IMAGINE WHAT YOU'VE BEEN THROUGH, BUT YOU'RE SAFE WITH ME. I MIGHT BE HUMAN BUT I'M A DAUGHTER OF EDEN, YOU SEE. WE EDENITES DON'T HOLD WITH THE HATE THE FEDERATION PREACHES.
I'M SURPRISED THERE ARE ANY EDENITES LEFT AT ALL THEN.
TUYA WAS SUPPOSED TO BE HERE. WE HAD A PLAN --
PLANS CHANGE. I'M HERE IN HER PLACE.
I DON'T BELIEVE YOU.
SHE THOUGHT YOU'D SAY THAT.
THERE WASN'T ROOM FOR YOUR WOODEN ARM.
TELL ME WHAT SHE SAID WHEN SHE GAVE YOU THIS.
SHE SAID...
"I WON'T BE HERE WHEN SHE COMES BACK."


"THIS IS AN OLD LUMBER TRACK. NOT MANY WHO USE IT, BUT BETTER NOT TO LINGER IF WE DON'T HAVE TO.
"THE REAL PROBLEM IS UP AHEAD. IT'S ALL PART OF THE WILD WALL, BUT SETTLED BY HUMANS NOW. ARCANICS WHO WERE PROMISED IN THE TREATY THAT THEY COULD STAY WERE DRIVEN OUT BY HUMAN SETTLERS. OR WORSE."
THERE'S A SECRET COMPARTMENT IN THE BOTTOM OF THE WAGON. MAIKA AND LITTLE KIPPA SHOULD SLIDE INSIDE.
MASTER REN, YOU BETTER HIDE YOUR TAIL. AND ACT...CATTY.
MEOW?
GET IN.
NO. I DON'T WANT TO BE ALONE WITH YOU. NOT IN THE DARK.
THERE IS NO TIME FOR THIS--
I DON'T CARE. I KNOW WHAT I SAW. I KNOW WHAT SHE DID TO HIM.
HIM?
THE BOY.
THE BOY WITH NO HANDS.
AH. YOU'D FORGOTTEN HIM ALREADY.
WHERE IS HE? TELL ME!
HE'S DEAD.

"YOU ATE HIM."
FLAY WAS ALREADY HERE. EVEN IF SHE HADN'T LEFT A NOTE, THERE ARE SUNFLOWER SHELLS EVERYWHERE. FUCKING SLOB.
SO, WHAT IS THIS? DID THE ARCANIC BURN HIM TO DEATH?
IMPOSSIBLE. NO WAY WAS HE KILLED USING INFERNAL ENERGY. THE WHOLE FOREST WOULD BE GONE.
ARE YOU ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN, HAMMER?
BUT NEEDLE --
TRUST YOUR SISTER. YOU WERE NOT AT CONSTANTINE,
BUT *SHE* WAS.

WHOA THERE! HOLD UP!
WE GOT A MAN UNDONE HERE!
HA HA.
YOU SHOULD HAVE GONE INTO THE COMPARTMENT. NO MATTER WHAT FOOLISHNESS THE CHILD SAID. IT'S SAFER.
A CLOSED DOOR RAISES SUSPICIONS. AN OPEN ONE DOESN'T.
WHICH IS TO SAY, FUCK IT. I'M NOT HIDING.
MAYBE YOU THINK THAT'S BRAVE.
BUT IT'S SELFISH. PUTS US ALL AT RISK.
WELL, IF IT ISN'T THE BROTHERS BELL. LOOKS LIKE YOU BOTH HAD A GOOD DAY IN THE WOODS.
THAT WE DID, EMILIA. WE'LL KEEP SOME VENISON ASIDE FOR YOU, IF YOU CAN SPARE A BAG OF THOSE POTATOES I KNOW YOU'RE HAULING.
THAT'S A BARGAIN I'D BE HAPPY WITH.
AN' WHO'S THIS?
MY COUSIN, HERE TO HELP WITH THE BABY. CAUGHT UP N THE WAR WHEN SHE WAS A CHILD, SO SHE DOESN'T TALK MUCH. YOU KNOW HOW IT IS WITH THE WOUNDED.
SHE DOESN'T LOOK LIKE YOU, EMILIA.
TRUE. OUR DADDY WAS NEVER THE SAME AFTER WHAT THE ARCANICS DID TO HIM.
I REMEMBER THE LAST GIRL WHO WAS SEEN IN YOUR COMPANY DIDN'T LOOK MUCH LIKE YOU, EITHER. AN' SHE DISAPPEARED A DAY LATER.
SAMUEL, THAT WAS JUST A CHILD I FED FOR A NIGHT. NO RELATION. SHE RAN OFF QUICK.
I GUESS. I JUST HOPE YOU'RE NOT MIXED UP WITH THAT OLD EDENITE SHIT AGAIN. THEM AN' THEIR SALVATION ROAD TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WALL.


I KNOW YOU SYMPATHIZE WITH THE ARCANIC ANIMALS, BUT --
WE PRAY FOR HUMANS AND ARCANICS TO BE AT PEACE AGAIN, AS IT WAS IN THE GARDEN OF OLD. IT WASN'T SO LONG AGO, WAS IT?
WHY, BOYS, YOUR GRANDDADDY HAD A BROTHER WHO MARRIED AN ARCANIC WOMAN, AND SHE MINDED YOU BOTH WHEN YOU WERE CHILDREN.
MY GRANDFATHER WAS A BLASPHEMER AND TRAITOR TO HIS RACE. WHEN THE FEDERATION TAKES OVER THESE LANDS --
-- ENOUGH OF THAT, HAMIS. SORRY EMILIA, BUT ALL SETTLEMENTS ARE SUPPOSED TO BE ON THE WATCH FOR ARCANICS. AN ALARM HAS GONE UP FROM THE CITY. SOLDIERS ARE COMING IN THE NEXT DAY OR SO.
ANYONE WE DON'T KNOW NEEDS TO BE TESTED. EITHER WITH A MOONSCOPE...OR BY DOG. FRIENDS OR NOT, EMILIA -- IT'S THE LAW.
WON'T TAKE BUT A MINUTE. SEE? THEY'RE EAGER TO SAY HELLO.
ARROOWLL
ARRRO
LOOK AT THEM! THEY'RE AFRAID OF MY POTATOES!
HRM?

SOMETHING'S OUT THERE, SAMUEL. SOMETHING THAT AIN'T SITTING ON THAT WAGON BENCH.
GRRRRR
RRRRUFFF
THAT'S RIGHT. I USED TO SEX BOTH YOUR MOTHERS AND FATHERS, YOU WORTHLESS, MANGY --
I'LL BE ON MY WAY, THEN. NEXT TIME YOU NEED TO QUESTION MY HONESTY, SAMUEL BELL, JUST COME TO MY HOME.
AND YOU, HAMIS, I HOPE ONE DAY YOU CAN FIND PEACE.
WE'LL KEEP GOING UNTIL WE'RE CLEAR OF THE SETTLEMENTS.
You were supposed to be here, Tuya.
But you knew, didn't you, that I wouldn't listen?
That I would do what I wanted to do.

But you were right to leave.
Just like it was right for me to go.
I can't be trusted.
Not even with you.
YOU'RE A DREAM, YOU'RE NOTHING.
JUST LEAVE ME --
-- ALONE!
DO YOU EVER STOP RUNNING?
OR WOULD THAT REQUIRE YOU TO BE TOO MUCH WITH YOURSELF?
YOU DON'T KNOW SHIT, CAT.
THE GIRL WAS RIGHT. I KILLED THAT BOY. I DON'T REMEMBER DOING IT, BUT IT WAS ME.
AND IT'S NOT THE FIRST TIME.
I CALL IT THE HUNGER. I DON'T KNOW WHAT IT IS, HOW TO STOP IT.
I THOUGHT I WOULD FIND ANSWERS IN ZAMORA. THE QUESTIONS ONLY GOT BIGGER.
DON'T THEY ALWAYS, LITTLE THIEF?

AND I HAVE A GREAT MANY QUESTIONS FOR YOU.
INQUISITRIX! BE WARNED: I AM COMMANDER REN MORMORIAN, APPRENTICE NEKOMANCER TO THE GREAT AND ANCIENT TWO-FACED ZORIAN OF WHITECLAW HOUSE! I HAVE RAISED THE ANCIENT DEAD!
I HAVE FOUGHT THE WRAITHMEN OF THE FORSAKEN FORESTS. CROSS ME AT YOUR OWN PERIL!
YOU CAN'T BLAME A CAT FOR TRYING.
FLEE!
SO YOU CAN RUN, IS THAT IT? RUN FASTER THAN ANY NORMAL HUMAN?
BUT NOT FASTER THAN ME!

CHUNKK!
NNGH!
YOU'VE HAD TRAINING, IT SEEMS. JUST NOT ENOUGH.
MY MISTRESS WANTS YOU ALIVE.
BUT ONLY IF YOU HAVE THE MASK. LET'S HAVE A GLANCE, WHY DON'T WE?
AUGH!
OH.

TO BE CONTINUED...

AN EXCERPT OF A LECTURE FROM THE ESTEEMED **PROFESSOR TAM TAM**, FORMER FIRST RECORD-KEEPER OF THE IS'HAMI TEMPLE, AND LEARNED CONTEMPORARY OF NAMRON BLACK CLAW...

TODAY WE CONTINUE OUR STUDY OF THE KNOWN WORLD WITH A DISCUSSION OF THE ANCIENT TRADE CITY OF ZAMOR'ATA -- NOW KNOWN AS ZAMORA.

FOUNDED LESS THAN FIVE HUNDRED YEARS AFTER THE DEATH OF THE GODS, ZAMOR'ATA WAS ONCE LITTLE MORE THAN A STABLE CAMPGROUND FOR HUMAN AND ARCANIC TRADERS TRAVELING THE LONG ROAD ACROSS THE CONTINENT.

HUMAN CARAVANS FROM AS FAR AS THE BURNED COAST WOULD STOP ON THEIR WAY TO THE ARCANIC REALMS, AND ARCANIC CONVOYS -- EVEN THOSE FROM NORTHERN ARKANGELUS -- WOULD TAKE THEIR REST ALONG THE ZAMOR'ATA RIVER.

LISTEN, YOU KITS: TRADERS WERE ONCE THE TRUE AMBASSADORS OF OUR DISPARATE REALMS. THEY TRADED MORE THAN MERE SPICE AND GLASS, AND CLOTH.

THEY PASSED BETWEEN EACH OTHER MUSIC AND POETRY, AND BOOKS. THEY GAVE EACH OTHER IDEAS AND RELIGION, AND TECHNOLOGY. THEY CREATED LASTING FRIENDSHIPS THAT WERE SHARED AND INHERITED, JUST LIKE BLOOD.

ZAMOR'ATA BECAME GREAT BECAUSE OF SUCH FRIENDSHIPS. THE CITY GREW UPON THE BONES OF THAT TRUST, AND BECAME AN EXAMPLE FOR OTHERS. THE EDENITE CITY OF PONTUS WOULD NOT EXIST WITHOUT ZAMOR'ATA, NOR WOULD ORLEEN OR EVEN THYRIA.

ALAS, THIS GOLDEN AGE OF EXCHANGE AND CONTACT IS NO MORE. OUR WORLD HAS BECOME DIVIDED. ON ONE SIDE IS THE FEDERATION OF MAN AND THEIR CUMAEAN ALLIES -- AND ON THE OTHER STAND THE ARCANIC REALMS.

ZAMOR'ATA -- THE BORDERLAND CITY THAT ONCE HELD THESE RACES TOGETHER, A CROSSROADS OF ALL OUR CULTURES -- IS NOW THE SITE OF INTRIGUE, SUSPICION, AND BREWING WAR. MANY BELIEVE IT WILL BECOME A FLASHPOINT THAT PRECEDES THE NEXT CONFLICT.

ALL ITS MONUMENTS TO FRIENDSHIP ARE LONG FORGOTTEN...

MONSTRESS LETTERS

WOW! We already have feedback for MONSTRESS #1, which we're proud to announce has gone to a Second Printing after selling out at the distributor level! Thank you!

Have an idea for a title for this letters column? Send it in! Now to the letters…

First of all, it was such a pleasure to meet you, Marjorie, at NYCC! Thank you for signing my comics, and for being super nice.

I have been waiting for MONSTRESS for FOREVER and I'm so glad I picked up the first issue on my lunch break today. I'm staring at the final panel of the cat as I type this. I have so much to say. I loved how the weirdness and horrors came out in Sana's beautiful, haunting art. The combination of slavery and as-of-yet unexplained cannibalism, magical science, and super feminine, sexy women. The mother/daughter/literal monstrous aunt dynamic. How absolutely out of place the little fox looked, her(?) cuteness making the horror of the situation even more sickening. Every second of it was unreal. And yet, your letters at the end, about surviving the surviving -- that's something topical to my life right now. Sometimes the things that work well when you're surviving aren't great for you when you're ready to live. The monsters keep you alive, but at what cost? And how do you let go of that? How do you find a sustainable way to live in the changing circumstances?

I can't wait for the next issue, to see how Maika negotiates these questions, and more beautiful art and writing.

Thank you!
Alice H.

Thank you so much for the lovely compliments and insightful analysis, Alice. Wishing you peace and love.

When I first heard word of this book, I was excited by the idea that a person could control an enormous monster! Now I know there's way more to this epic! MONSTRESS is my new favorite title! It's such a powerful start with astounding creatures, unique cultures, amazing landscapes, and in the center of it all a girl thrown into a hell that changes her for better or worse. In one issue you've managed to create a massive story filled with fear, segregation, sacrifice and a hunt for the truth. Thank you for showing that the monsters aren't always the wandering behemoth in plain sight.

Your Fan,
Matthew A.

Thanks for the kind words, Matthew! I hope you enjoy the rest of the MONSTRESS journey as much as you enjoyed issue #1.

Reading this comic, which I have awaited since it got announced, I had a curious thought. I never thought a single issue of a comic with this many pages would ever be over too soon. However, that's what happened here. Immediately after finishing it I sat at my laptop and formed this email in my mind.

I was so engrossed in the story that I didn't even realise how many pages I had left. Whilst I gained no knowledge of this world or these characters just yet (intentionally, I'm sure), I gained an insatiable desire for the exact thing you'd withheld. You bestow this new world-building onto us and then, as I find myself aching to know everything... Maika is on the floor. Seemingly lifeless. The issue is over. No MONSTRESS for another month.

"Wait... what? WHAT?" In life, often, you wait so long for a moment and then it's a memory almost as quickly as it's a present event. So, after however many months of waiting, a year or more I believe, I have now read MONSTRESS #1 and I am, as I expected, utterly floored.

Each panel of this comic book could be framed as an art piece. There is zero waste. As if the sublime art wasn't enough, the dialogue itself was par excellence. The way Sana draws Maika and the way you write her with such boiling, sub-surface rage and anger... it just bleeds off the page.

So... after this relatively well-thought out email I have to say, to both of you, bravo. This is going to be special.

With respect,
David M.

P.S: Is it TOO outlandish to request you make this a weekly? A guy can dream.

Thanks, David! Unfortunately, a weekly title might make poor Sana's hands fall off, but hopefully our monthly schedule will satiate your MONSTROUS hunger.

MONSTRESS #1 was a perfect blend of story and art. I haven't been this pumped up over a new series since *Carbon Grey.* In addition to Sana Takeda's wonderful character designs, I love the Art Deco vibe of this world. The story too is top-notch, balancing action, character development and just the right level of nastiness. If you maintain the quality, I will be in it to the end. Speaking of which… how long is the series projected to last?

Joel S.

Joel, we definitely know how the series ends…just not how long it'll take us to get there. Rest assured, though, MONSTRESS is going to be around for quite some time — thanks to readers like you.

As soon as I saw the first page of MONSTRESS #1 in a preview I reserved a copy at my local shop. I've just finished reading it. I've got thousands of comics in my basement, and every once in a while I read a book that resonates deeply with me. MONSTRESS is one of these books. The art is spectacular and rich and lovely. The story is ambitious and filled with promise. I love all these strong women filled with purpose and pain and determination.

I've been writing for years, and this last year I've been working on a dragon/steampunk/adventure novel filled with strong women. I had not specifically intended this, it's just how it's happened. Perhaps it's because of my daughter (who loves to draw with me), perhaps it's because of my loving wife, perhaps it's because I miss my mother who passed away three years ago. All strong women who have taught me much.

Keep going, don't stop, be strong!
Glenn P.

Thank you, Glenn. I'm glad you have strong women in your life who inspire you. Over here at Team MONSTRESS, we also have strong heroines in our own families who inspire us daily, and that's part of what drives us to make MONSTRESS the best comic it can be. (Hi, Mom!)

Wow, wow, wow. I just finished reading the first issue and couldn't have imagined where the story would take me. I loved the setting, the theme, the characters, and especially the gravity of the horrors that Maika has experienced. So often violence and war is depicted in a glorious way, but MONSTRESS manages to go beyond that and gives us devastating tragedy as well.

And talk about the art! Sometimes you come across comics that impress, but Sana's work goes so far beyond that. Every page I flipped, I found myself in awe of the details. From the embellishments on walls down to individual blades of grass, you can see that it's a fucking labor of love.

MONSTRESS is a prime example of how comic books can be the best form of storytelling there is and I can't wait to see what unfolds!

Best,
Peter N.

I'm a regular comic reader for a long time but never decided to write a letter to any of the creators before. After I read first issue of MONSTRESS I knew I had to. You totally got me! I absolutely love everything. The art - I got no words to describe how much I adore it. The colors are simply fantastic. They say that one image can say more than a thousand words - that's how good your book is! I cannot wait to find more about Maika and really looking into the story and how it develops. You are #1 on my list!

Best wishes and keep doing great work.

Maciej R.

PS: Little Fox holding her tail when she's scared - she's so cute.

Reading MONSTRESS by @marjoriemliu and Sana Takeda with our new kitty. He was quite shocked by the last panel!

Shaun M.

We can't promise we won't shock your kitty again, Shaun, but we're glad to know strong reactions to MONSTRESS aren't restricted to one species!

Great and intriguing story so far! Stunning artwork as well. I am just starting to collect comics, and my friend referred me to this series.

I can't wait for the next issue.
Kevin A.

I just finished the first issue, and it was AMAZING! The art is gorgeous which is backed with an intense and captivating story, things I needed in my comic diet! I can't wait for the next issue!

Thank you for a great comic,
Wren W.

I am very excited with your work here on MONSTRESS #1. The art and story are in perfect harmony. You've really created something special and unique here and I look forward to reading your next issue. Seriously, you girls (and Rus) blew me away!

Thanks for creating this series,
Alex

Thank you all for your kind words. We're thrilled that this book has found such an enthusiastic audience already, and we can't wait to show you what we've got planned.

And that's it for now. Keep your letters coming, MONSTRESS fans! We'll see you again in a month.

- Editor Jennifer

#MONSTERVALKS

The Valkyries -- the network of awesome women working in comic stores worldwide -- showed their love for Maika and her story by taking pictures with MONSTRESS #1 on its release date and flooding social media using the hashtag **#MonsterValks**. To thank them, the *Monstress* team chose some of our favorite pictures to print here! We love seeing powerful ladies supporting each other in and out of comics, and appreciate it more than we can say.

MARJORIE'S SCRIPT...

PAGE TEN

Panel 1
MAIKA jolts awake, gasping.

Panel 2
Pull out, and MAIKA looks around in surprise. She's half-sitting up, covered in blankets (still dressed in that prison shift) – in the back of a horse-drawn wagon – the back is open, and there are bags of potatoes around them, small containers of produce. On the bags and on the containers are the stamp of the Cumaean emblem. We see the back of a woman wearing a jaunty hat and dark red jacket – and they're driving on a dirt-track road in the forest. KIPPA is asleep, as far from MAIKA as possible. She's dressed in normal clothes now. The cat is sitting there...staring at something that rests at his feet...(we see its profile)

CAT: YOU'RE AWAKE. FINALLY.

Panel 3
Zoom in. We see the cat is examining the photo. But we also see that MAIKA has seen him doing this, and her expression is alarmed...

CAT: DID YOU KNOW THAT THE WOMAN BEHIND YOU IN THIS PHOTOGRAPH BEARS AN UNCANNY RESEMBLANCE TO THE SWORD OF THE EAST HERSELF?

CAT: NOW THAT I THINK ABOUT IT, YOU YOURSELF ARE ALSO --

Panel 4
MAIKA grabs the cat's tail. The cat gives her an annoyed look, paw half raised (like cats do, when they're thinking about scratching someone).

MAIKA: GIVE ME THE PHOTOGRAPH. GIVE IT TO ME OR I'LL KILL YOU.

CAT: YOU'LL KILL ME? YOU CAN BARELY MOVE.

Panel 5
MAIKA makes a grab for the photo, and collapses. KIPPA jolts awake, pressed against the wall of the wagon. She looks terrified. Her little hand is bandaged. The cat leans back, looking totally unconcerned.

MAIKA: NNNGH!

KIPPA: WHAT – HAVE THEY FOUND US?

CAT: WE'RE SAFE FOR NOW, KIPPA.

CAT: MAIKA IS BEING DRAMATIC, THAT'S ALL.

Panel 6
MAIKA is struggling to push herself up. The CAT uses its paw to slide the photo toward her head, right under her nose.

CAT: ALL YOU HAD TO DO WAS ASK.

MAIKA: WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE? LAST TIME I SAW YOU....IT WAS ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WALL.

EMILIA (OP): HEY, NOW. EVERYTHING RIGHT AN' GOOD BACK THERE?

PAGE ELEVEN

Panel 1
Pull out so that we finally see the driver glancing back at them. The woman has light brown skin, her curly hair in two loose braids that frame her face. Freckles dash her nose. She has a crooked smile that's good-natured. And she has a baby strapped to her chest. We see the cat sitting up on its hind legs, one paw touching the bench.

EMILIA: NO FIGHTIN' IN MY WAGON, PLEASE. THOSE ARE NICE EATS I NEED TO SELL. CAN'T HAVE YOU DAMAGING THEM.

CAT: OUR DEEPEST APOLOGIES, MISTRESS EMILIA. YOUR KINDNESS HAS ALREADY BEEN WITHOUT MEASURE...

CAT: ...AND IS MATCHED ONLY BY YOUR GRACE.

EMILIA: OH, YOU CATS.

Panel 2
Cut back to MAIKA, who is holding the photo – and sees her bag (with the mask inside) next to KIPPA.

MAIKA: THE MASK.

Panel 3
MAIKA yanks the satchel away from her.

MAIKA: WHO SAID THIS WAS YOURS?

KIPPA: MEEP!

Panel 4
MAIKA looks inside her satchel, about to put the photo back in...we see the mask fragment....we also see KIPPA looking scared, cradling her hand.

KIPPA: MISTER REN MADE ME CARRY IT FOR YOU.

KIPPA: BUT I DIDN'T WANT TO. IT HURT MY HAND.

KIPPA: IT'S CURSED. (IN SMALL LETTERS) YOU CAN FEEL IT.

Panel 5
The cat jumps down between KIPPA and MAIKA. (change lettering font to represent different language)

CAT: THE CHILD DOESN'T SPEAK HANNIC. BUT YOU DO.

MAIKA: WHAT DO I CARE WHAT SHE HEARS OR UNDERSTANDS?

CAT: BECAUSE SHE'S FRIGHTENED ENOUGH. AND EMILIA IS ONLY HUMAN.

Panel 6
Overhead shot, so we're looking over MAIKA'S shoulder at the mask. It's still in the bag, she's not touching it – the cat is peering over her lap to look at it, too.

CAT: DO YOU KNOW WHAT THAT IS?

MAIKA: SOMETHING IMPORTANT. SOMETHING THAT THE WITCH-NUN VALUED. SOMETHING THAT...CHANGED HER.

CAT: OF COURSE IT CHANGED HER, IF SHE HAD IT LONG ENOUGH. THAT IS AN ARTIFACT FROM THE LOST AGE, WROUGHT OF BLASPHEMOUS MATERIALS POISONOUS TO ALL LIVING CREATURES.

CAT: YOU FELT IT, DIDN'T YOU? THE DANGER OF IT? THAT TRINKET WILL GET YOU EXECUTED ON BOTH SIDES OF THE WALL. BY HUMAN AND ARCANIC AUTHORITIES ALIKE.

SNEAK PEEK AT ISSUE 3...

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